

January 21, 2007 DATE 1/23/07HB 223

Representative John Sinrud, Chair
Representative Eve Franklin, Vice-Chair
Member of House Appropriations Committee
P.O. Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Honorable Representatives Sinrud and Franklin,

I am writing to offer the support of the Montana Organic Association for House Bill 223, an act establishing a regional value-added agricultural program that will create and fund seven regional rural economic development centers. Based on the past success of Montana Agriculture Innovation Centers this is a timely and critical effort. The Montana Organic Association has over 200 members and its mission is to advocate and promote organic agriculture, for the highest good of the people, the environment and the state's economy.

In organic agriculture Montana has products that already have added value simply because a growing number of consumers are recognizing that how we produce our food and the final quality of that product for their health is of growing importance to them. Nonetheless our members have been struggling to add even greater value to their products and HB 223 will provide much needed assistance to make those efforts a reality. We know this is true because of the past record of Montana agricultural innovation centers that have already helped our members by, for example:

- Offering assistance in the development of the expansion of processing facilities for Timeless Seeds, a national and international company that buys and sells Montana organic seeds
- Assisting a Lewistown organic farmer in his development of an organic Indian corn bread mix. Technical assistance in product mixing, packaging and labeling have contributed toward the development of this value-added product
- Providing our association with a small grant to develop a brochure and website which can help more Montana producers take advantage of the rapidly expanding organic food market

All Montana farmers can grow high quality crop and livestock raw materials for export out of our state. What HB 223 offers is the critical resources to assist farmers, ranchers and rural citizens to further develop their entrepreneurial passions and keep more of the value of these products in this state for themselves and their communities. Thank you for your careful consideration.

Sincerely,

 For Judy Owsowitz

Judy Owsowitz

President

Montana Organic Association